★ TORONTO STAR ★ TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2005

Forget what you think you know

You know a diploma is worth less and less. Soon it's going to be worth nothing at all.

If you've just completed an undergraduate degree you might not want to hear what Mississauga-based futurist Jim Carroll has to say.

"For young people I think one of the things they will need to understand is the skill of 'just-in-time' knowledge," says Carroll, who advises companies across North America.

He explains that "just-in-time" knowledge is the skill of learning information during quickly advancing periods of change. The information learned is entirely — and possibly only — relevant at a specific time. Learning it will require people to immediately dump previous information that is no longer relevant at the same time.

"The concept of going to school for knowledge is kind of quaint," says Carroll, who foresees a future when longer degree programs will become almost obsolete. "What is the relevance of a three or four or five-year degree program when half of what kids learn in their first year will be obsolete by the time they graduate?"

Carroll says the majority of knowledge needed in the workplace of the future will be gained from collaborative social networks, online sources and independent learning.

As far as formal education goes, he doesn't think many degree programs will be longer than about nine months.

"A survey I saw a couple weeks ago said young people now think self-employment is more secure than a corporate job.

"As young people continue to completely reject the concept of the traditional workplace they will also move to educational models that suit their relationship with a changing work world."

SAN GREWAL